



Mercury Removal and Schools

Schools are often asked to be the change agents for model citizenship in support of the environment. The Mercury Education and Reduction Act (MERA) of 2003 asks schools to once again model cutting-edge environmental leadership regarding products containing mercury. MERA was passed to help protect the citizens and environment of Washington from mercury contamination. Schools play an important role in leading this effort. The goal of the Washington State Departments of Health and Ecology in communicating with schools about this law is to provide the information and assistance that may be needed to ensure that the potential for exposure to mercury in Washington's schools is minimized.

School-Specific Details of MERA: MERA outlines several specific actions schools should take to reduce use and increase proper disposal of mercury containing products.

Specifically, MERA states that as of January 1, 2006, schools:

- May no longer purchase elemental mercury or chemical mercury compounds for use in schools; and
- Must properly dispose of all elemental mercury and mercury compounds.

In addition, schools should be aware that the purchase and sale of the following mercury-added products will be illegal as of January 1, 2006:

- Mercury containing thermometers and manometers (blood pressure cuffs); and
- Mercury containing thermostats, not participating in the TRC Take-Back Program, and novelty items such as games, toys and jewelry.

The legislation also mandates that the mercury symbol on this page must be on all fluorescent bulbs as a reminder that these and all high intensity bulbs should be handled and recycled so no mercury exposures occur.

List of Personnel Affected: There are a number of school personnel who could be impacted by this legislation:

- Administrators and principals who set and enforce the policy;
- Curriculum directors, science, family life and vocational skills teachers who use elemental mercury or thermometers for instructional purposes;
- Risk managers who are responsible for monitoring risk reduction practices;
- Nurses and office staff who may have thermometers for use with students or staff;
- Maintenance and operations staff who store, remove and discard lights and thermostats; and
- Parenting, teacher and student booster groups that may have novelty items containing mercury for sale.

List of Products in the Schools: The following is a partial list of products that could contain mercury in and around the educational environment:

• Elemental mercury in labs	• Mercury compounds
• Fluorescent bulbs	• High intensity lights
• Thermometers	• Manometers
• Thermostats	• Vehicle switches and ABS
• Novelty items	• Scoliometers

Proper Disposal: While most Washington school districts had a hazardous chemical assessment completed as part of the “Rehab the Lab” project, not all schools were funded to have the chemicals removed, including mercury. Many hazardous waste facilities allow schools to bring in spent bulbs, elemental mercury, mercury compounds and other mercury-added products. If there is no hazardous waste program locally or the local program does not allow schools to use their facility, school districts can contact their Educational Service District about available resources. Another resource is the Department of General Administration (GA) for contracts on Spent Lighting (# 11601) or Hazardous Waste Disposal and Recycling (#07198). Their Web site is: www.ga.wa.gov, or call: 360-902-7441.

The Law: The law mandating these changes is: RCW 70.95M.040 Schools -- Purchase of mercury prohibited: *A school may not purchase for use in a primary or secondary classroom bulk elemental mercury or chemical mercury compounds. By January 1, 2006, all primary and secondary schools in the state must remove and properly dispose of all bulk elemental mercury, chemical mercury, and bulk mercury compounds used as teaching aids in science classrooms, not including barometers.*

To view the entire law, go to <http://www.leg.wa.gov/rcw/>.

Resources: Several resources exist from DOH that could be good references to school personnel:

- The Schools and MERA fact sheet.
- Schools and MERA slide show.
- Best Management Practices, Mercury and Schools.

Publications and Web sites on mercury products and how to clean up a mercury spill are also available:

- Mercury Awareness www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0104022.pdf
- Fish Facts www.doh.wa.gov/fish
- Ecology Web site www.mercurymess.org
- EPA Web site www.epa.gov/mercury/about.htm

For further information contact the Washington State Departments of Health and Ecology at:

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